

## UGS 303: Cinema of Black Protest

Instructor: Dr. Patrick F. Walter

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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00-11:00 GW Building; Nneka Ugochi Waturuocha Reading Room

Teaching Assistant:

Lecture: MW 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. WAG 101

Screening: TBA

Discussion: 61440: F 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. CAL 21

61445: F 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. CAL 21

61450: F 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. CAL 21

61455: Th 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. MAI 220D

61460 Th 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. MAI 220D

61465 Th 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. MAI 220 D

### Description

In this course, we think about film as site of racial antagonism. The invention of motion pictures is intertwined with colonization, chattel slavery, and the emergence of blackness and whiteness as definitive concepts of modernity, and the development of cinema has played a significant role in the ongoing processes of both white supremacy and black emancipation. Simply put, film hasn't merely reflected the politics of race; it has taken an active role in this politics, most often by policing the color line and perpetuating anti-black violence, but on rare occasions also providing a technology for black revolt. In this course, we will focus primarily on these latter instances in which black filmmakers attempt to wield cinema as weapon of emancipation. However, we will also study the dominant articulation of blackness and whiteness in "mainstream" cinema as well.

The screenings, readings and assignments in this course are intended to introduce key critical theories of race, fundamental aspects of film studies, and the history of black filmmaking within the transatlantic diaspora. As we learn about how film operates and how to read and write about film, we will be working through major movements in black philosophy, politics and aesthetics such as Afropessimism, Black Power, Afrofuturism, Queer of Color Critique, and Black Feminism. How has film buttressed the political logic of Slavery? How do contemporary representations of blackness in cinema reiterate or diverge from those of classic Hollywood? Can film – or any art form – function as a truly impactful tool for black liberation? How has cinema offered a place to formulate black queerness or black womanhood? These are some of the questions that will guide us through the semester.

#### Primary Films and Music Videos:

Micheaux, Oscar. *Within Our Gates* (1920)

-Kanopy

Griffiths, D. W. *Birth of a Nation* (1915)

-Youtube

Jewison, Norman. *In the Heat of the Night* (1967)

-Course Reserve or Amazon Streaming: B000053VBH

Fuqua, Antoine. *Training Day* (2001)

-Course Reserve or Amazon Streaming

Sembène, Ousmane. *Black Girl* (1969)

-Course Reserve or Amazon Streaming

- Henzell, Perry. *The Harder They Come* (1973)  
-Kanopy
- Gerima, Haile. *Bush Mama* (1979)  
-Course Reserve or Amazon **Purchase**
- Lichtman, Rene. *Finally Got the News* (1970)  
-Youtube
- Parks Jr. Gordon. *Super Fly* (1972)  
-Course Reserve or Amazon Streaming (free with free trial of Brown Sugar)
- Hill, Jack. *Foxy Brown* (1974)  
-Course Reserve or Amazon Streaming.
- Dunye, Cheryl. *The Watermelon Woman* (1997)  
-Kanopy
- Riggs, Marlon. *Tongues Untied* (1989)  
-Kanopy
- Jenkins, Berry. *Moonlight* (2016)  
-Course Reserve, Amazon Streaming or Swank Digital Campus
- Murai, Hiro. "The Streisand Effect." *Atlanta*. (2016)  
-Amazon Streaming
- . "This is America" (2018)  
-Youtube
- . "Never Catch Me" (2014)  
-Youtube
- Joseph, Kahil. "Until the Quiet Comes" (2012)  
-Youtube
- . "Formation" (2016)  
-Youtube
- Peele, Jordan. *Get Out* (2017)  
-Swank Digital Campus

*Note: Our films are our primary texts, and your viewing of them is mandatory. Preferably, this viewing will take place during the official screening time. If, due to reasonable circumstances, you cannot make the screenings, all of the films are available through reserve in the Fine Arts Library, on Kanopy, or streaming where listed. I highly recommend purchasing Amazon Prime for this course so you can purchase or rent a number of the films. You must view these films in order to participate in the course.*

## Readings:

All readings will be available on Canvas. You are responsible for completing the assigned readings prior to lecture and discussion, and I strongly suggest printing out a hard copy of the day's readings so you can point to passages in discussion.

## Assignments and Grade Breakdown

*(For more detailed description of these assignments the end of his document.)*

- Essay 1: 20%
- Essay 2: 20%
- Annotated Bibliography: 20%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Discussion Presentation: 10%
- Event Summaries: 10%

Attendance/participation: 10%

## Course Policies

Attendance: Attendance at screenings, lectures and discussions sections is mandatory, and attendance will be taken at each of these meetings. Success in this course also depends upon your active participation in discussions.

Technology: There will be no use of laptops or phones in lectures, discussions, or screenings. Anyone on a phone or laptop will be asked to leave and will not receive attendance credit for the day.

Code of Academic Conduct: University policy requires that students cite sources they use in their work. THIS INCLUDES PARAPHRASING of materials. Any inclusion of ideas that are not your own will be considered plagiarism. Students who do not properly cite ideas, quotes or paraphrasing of other published or unpublished material will automatically face disciplinary action, which will also reflect in their grade.

Language and Comportment: This course necessitates the discussion of complex and delicate ideas about race and power. Throughout the semester, in papers and discussions, attempt to use precise and up-to-date language. For example, rather than “freedom” perhaps “emancipation” or “manumission” is more appropriate. The use of the terms lesbian, gay, trans, or queer, are more specific and accurate than homosexual. Either “Black women” or “black men” is preferable to “the Black Man” or “the Black woman.” Never use the n-word unless quoting in an essay, and even then, try to avoid it. Use African American rather than “negro” or “colored” and black where appropriate (e.g. Jimmy Cliff, a Jamaican musician, is black but *not* African American). Most importantly, be respectful to your fellow classmates. If you do not feel that what you are about to say is inappropriate, maybe give yourself some time to work through your thought or share it with your TA or myself in an office hour before articulating said thought in class.

Religious Holidays: If you observe a recognized religious holiday that is in conflict with the university schedule, you can speak with me to make accommodations.

Students with Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

TRIGGER WARNING: This course is about race and cinema. We will encounter films that are sometimes very frankly and violently racist, misogynist, and homophobic. These films sometimes contain explicit scenes of sex. This will also be subject matter of many of our lectures and conversations. I will try to provide specific warnings for certain classes or screenings, but I am also providing this general warning for the entire course.

## Schedule

### Slavery/Jim Crow

#### Week 1

Wednesday 1/23: Course Introduction

Reading: *Plessy v. Ferguson*; Alexander Falconbridge: *An Account of the Middle Passage*; *Barbados Slave Code*; *Dred Scott v. Sandford*; Omi, Michael. *Racial Formations*

Screening

*Birth of a Nation*

And

Paul Gilroy's notes on *Birth of a Nation* (Youtube)

**Week 2**

Monday 1/28: Discussion of readings. What is race?

Reading

James Snead's "Birth of a Nation"

Wednesday 1/30: Discussion of Birth and Introduction to silent film.

Reading: Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks* (selection)

Screening

*Within Our Gates*

**Week 3**

Monday 2/4: Discussion of film. Discussion of Fanon.

Wednesday 2/6: Finish discussing Fanon and film.

Reading: Sexton, Jared. *The Ruse of Engagement*. Baldwin, James. "Sidney Poitier"

Screening

*In the Heat of the Night*

**The (Im)possibility of Black Hollywood**

**Week 4**

Monday 2/11: **Four Annotations Due! Quiz 1 in Discussion sections.** Discussion of Baldwin and *In the Heat of the Night*

Wednesday 2/13: Discussion of Sexton the Afropessimist thesis.

Reading: Wilderson, Frank. *Red, White, and Black* (Selections)

Screening

*Training Day*

**Week 5**

Monday 2/18: Discussion of *Training Day* and Wilderson.

Reading: Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth* selections.

Wednesday 2/20: Discussion of Fanon. Introduction to cinemas of decolonization.

Reading: Mortimer, Robert. "Ousmane Sembène and the Cinema of Decolonization";

Screening

*Black Girl*

**Decolonization**

**Week 6**

Monday 2/25: **ESSAY 1 Due!** Discussion of Sembène and *Black Girl*

Reading: Solanas, Fernando and Octavio Getino. "Toward a Third Cinema"; Rocha, Glauber. "Aesthetics of Hunger"; Espinosa, Julio Garcia. "For an Imperfect Cinema" and "Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema."

Wednesday 2/27: Third Cinema discussion and examples.

Reading: Harrow, Kenneth. "The Out of Place Scene of Trash"

Screening:

*The Harder They Come*

**Week 7**

Monday 3/4: Jamaican Decolonization and *The Harder They Come*

Reading: Antoine-Dunne, Jean. "Sound and Vision in the Caribbean Imaginary"

Wednesday 3/6: Black cinema as an audio-visual experience.

Reading: Newton, Huey P. and Bobby Seale. "Black Panther The Ten Point Program"; Coordinating Committee for The Black Liberation Army: *Message to the Black Movement*. Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography* (selections)

Screening

*Bush Mama* and *Finally Got the News*

## **Black Power and Blaxploitation**

### **Week 8**

Monday 3/11: Discussion of readings and *Bush Mama*.

Reading: Field, Allyson Naia, Jan-Christopher Horak and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart. "Emancipating the Image"

Wednesday 3/13: The L.A. Rebellion.

Reading: Horak, Jan-Christopher. "Tough Enough" Guerrero, Ed. *From Birth to Blaxploitation* (selections).

Screening:

*Super Fly*

### **Week 9**

Monday 3/18: SPRING BREAK

Wednesday 3/20: SPRING BREAK

## **Black Feminism on Screen**

### **Week 10**

Monday 3/25: **Second 4 annotations due! Quiz 2 in Discussion.** Blaxploitation. Discussion of Horak and the film.

Reading: Ongiri, Amy Abugo. "You Better Watch This Good Shit"

Wednesday 3/27: Discussion of Ongiri.

Reading: "Combahee River Collective Statement" Davis, Angela. *Women, Race and Class* (selections).

Screening

*Foxy Brown*

### **Week 11**

Monday 4/1: Discussion of readings and film. Intersectionality and/or Afropessimism.

Reading: Dunn, Staphane. "Sexing the Supermama"

Wednesday 4/3 Discussion of Dunn

Reading: hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze"

Screening

*The Watermelon Woman*

## **Queer of Color Cinema**

### **Week 12**

Monday 4/8 Discussion of hooks and *The Watermelon Woman*

Reading: Fran, Michel. "Eating the (M)Other"

Wednesday 4/10 Discussion of Fran.

Reading: Pincheon, Bill Stanford. "Invisible Men Made Visible" Harper, Phillip Bryan.

“Walk-on Parts and Speaking Subjects”

Screening

*Tongues Untied* and *Moonlight*

**Week 13**

Monday 4/15: Discussion of *Tongues Untied*

Reading: Sexton, Jared. “Shadow and Myth”

Wednesday 4/17: Discuss Sexton and *Moonlight*. Notes on New Jack Cinema

Reading: Alexander, Elizabeth. ““Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?”” Elmi, Roony. “Body Cam” Schwartz, Louis-Georges. “In Plain View”; Min,

Screening

*Atlanta*: “The Streisand Effect”

“This is America”

“Never Catch Me”

**Post-Cinema Blackness and Post-Obama Cinema**

**Week 14**

Monday 4/22: **Quiz 3** Discussion of films and readings.

Reading: Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection* (selections); Joyner, Jazmine. “Who is Childish Gambino’s ‘This is America’ Really For?”

Wednesday 4/24: Discussion of Hartman and Joyner. Spectacle and anti-blackness.

Reading: Manning, Emily. “Is Kahil Joseph Hip Hop’s Most Important Director?” Deterville, Duane. “Kahil Joseph’s ‘Until the Quiet Comes’: The Afriscap Ghostdance on Film (part 1 and 2)”

Screening

*Until the Quiet Comes*

*Lemonade*

**Week 15**

Monday: 4/29: Discussion of *Until the Quiet Comes*.

Reading: Wards, Mako Fitts. “Queen Bey and the New Niggerati”; Bale, Miriam. “‘Lemonade’ is a Revolutionary Work of Black Feminism.”

Wednesday 5/1: Discussion of *Lemonade*

Reading: Cruz, Lenika. “In *Get Out*, the Eyes Have It”

Screening

*Get Out*

**Week 16**

Monday 5/6: Discussion of *Get Out* and Cruz. **Quiz 4 in discussion section.**

Wednesday 5/8: **ESSAY 2 Due! Final Annotated Bibliography Due.** Final thoughts.

**Assignment Descriptions**

Essays 1 and 2: In these 5-7 page essays, you will analyze a particular aspect of one of the films we have watched thus far in class. You will consider how this feature of the film relates to the dynamics of blackness that we have discussed in class. Throughout your analysis, you should use both one reading from class and one reading that you have found for your annotated bibliography to help frame and/or enrich your argument. In other words, there will be two secondary sources in your essay, and you will need to cite them properly both in-text and in your Works Cited page. Note, however, that I don’t want you to simply repeat ideas from these readers or from lectures/discussions. This essay is a space for you to develop your own unique reading of the film. Your essay should follow standard MLA formatting criteria, i.e. 12 point

font, Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins. **Essay 1 Due Monday 2/25; Essay 2 Due Wednesday 5/8.**

Annotated Bibliography: Throughout the semester, you will locate and annotate 10 scholarly sources dealing with the lectures, readings, and films we are covering. Our reading list for the course, while extensive, hardly conveys the breadth of scholarship written on cinema and race. The bibliography is the place where you will begin doing your own research and reading related to the subject matter we are covering. The sources you find must relate in some way to our readings and discussions, and these sources must be scholarly. Once you have found a source, you need to cite it in proper MLA format, and below this source, you need to write two brief paragraphs summarizing the source and explaining its relevance to our class. Over the course of the semester, there will be two due dates for Annotated Bibliography. On 2/25, you will submit four annotations. On the last day of class you will submit a final draft with all ten sources. The sources should be listed alphabetically by the author's last name.

*Example of an annotation:*

Jones, Bob. "Queer Blackness in American Film." *Black Film Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2014, pp. 34-55.

In this article, Bob Jones provides a history of representations of black gay characters in cinema. In doing so, however, he suggests that we must broaden our definition of what might count as a "black gay character," since, as he puts it, "The conjunction of white supremacy and homophobia in American culture has practically eliminated queer of color subjects from the big screen" (32). Jones then looks at black characters from early silent film and 1950s race films who aren't explicitly gay but whose performances of gender and desire imply non-normative sexuality. He then aligns these precursors with contemporary cinema such as that of Marlon Riggs and Cheryl Dunye, in which black queerness is expressed more frankly.

Jones' essay provides some unique context for our screenings of Riggs and Dunye. What's more, his approach to thinking about sexuality in cinema has made me reconsider certain aspects of films we have watched earlier in the semester, such as *In the Heat of the Night*. I am interested in bringing Jones' critical approach to Poitier's masculinity in that film. Monday 2/11:

**First four Annotations Due Monday 2/11. Second 4 annotations due Monday 3/25! Final Annotated Bibliography of 10 sources due Wednesday 5/8.**

Quizzes: There will be a viewing quiz each week in your discussion section. If you have watched the week's film(s), this quiz should be easy. Along with these viewing quizzes there will be four reading quizzes; these quizzes will be short, six-to-ten question surveys of the readings we have been covering in class. Any information from the readings, lectures or discussions could appear on the quizzes. They will consist of a few short answer and longer answer questions. The reading quiz dates are listed in the syllabus schedule. **Quiz 1 in discussion section of week 4. Quiz 2 in discussion section of week 10. Quiz 3 in discussion section of week 14. Quiz 4 discussion section of Week 16.**

Discussion Presentation: Your discussion sections will often begin with a short ten minute group presentation. In these presentations, you will reflect on readings and lectures in a way that will facilitate the day's conversation. So, you will be graded, in part, on your capacity to get the rest of the class engaged in the discussion. You can be creative in your presentation, and I would encourage you to do so. You are essentially leading the class, so consider strategies that your former teachers have employed which you found captivating. You will be responsible for one

presentation with your group. There will be a sign-up sheet in the first week(s) of class. **Due date TBA when sign-up sheets are distributed.**

Event and Lecture Summaries: UGS courses require participation in the UT Lecture Series and attendance at one of the GEM institutions. You must attend two events, and you must submit a one-page response paper for each of these activities. The following are recommended lectures and events for this course:

- Fugitive Futures Symposium (location and times TBA)
  - You may either attend a conference panel or the keynote by Saidiya Hartman
- Blanton Museum of Art: *Liana Porter films*, December 8 – February 24
  - Kambui Olujimi: Zulu Time*, January 26 – July 14
  - Words/Matter*: February 17 – May 26
  - The Propeller Group*: March 8 – May 26
- Briscoe Center: 1968: *The Year the Dream Died*, Mon – Fri 10a.m.-5p.m., Sat. 9a.m.-1p.m.
- Dr. Ken Cokley. *The Role of the Imposter Phenomenon in Ethnic Minority Student Achievement*  
February 11, 7-8p.m. Texas Union Theatre
- Dr. Ted Gordon's Racial Geography Tour, Available online. More information TBA.
- Warfield Center, Christian-Green Gallery. *In Passing*, Jan 31 – May 4.
- Warfield Center, Idea Lab. *That Which Surrounds Us*. Feb. 14 – May 17.

I will announce other events that come to my attention, and I would be open to other suggestions of University affiliated events that have connections to the course. **These two response papers will be due before the end of the semester.**